

INTERAGENCY COORDINATION for ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT of OIL AND GAS RESOURCES GREATER ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION



(Divide Creek Unit #2, at 10,461 feet, is the highest gas well in the United States. Drilled in 1957, the well continues to produce gas from the Divide Creek natural gas field on the White River National Forest, Colorado.)

INTERAGENCY COORDINATION for ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT of OIL AND GAS RESOURCES in the GREATER ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

Unprecedented high levels of natural gas resource development in Rocky Mountain basins have raised concerns about effects of development activities on other resources and the process by which those effects are analyzed. In October 1998, state and regional senior managers of the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service convened to address those concerns. The resulting multi-agency task force is commonly known as the "Federal Leadership Forum" (Forum) and is being expanded to include Bureau of Indian Affairs, as well as the Department of Energy in an advisory capacity. The Forum has identified key issues associated with oil and gas resource development, and has developed options to address these concerns through improved environmental analysis. Various Forum teams and sub-teams continue to work on improving specific aspects of the NEPA* process for environmental analysis of oil and gas activities. Outcomes of the Federal Leadership Forum efforts involve no decision-making for land management, but are focused on how federal agencies will work together in the oil and gas NEPA process.

Federal Leadership Forum Goal:

***Establish a quality, predictable, consistent NEPA process
for oil and gas development.***

* National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires environmental analysis of major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment.

Federal Leadership Forum Teams

Coordination

Federal Leaders

Senior managers

*Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service,
National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs,
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection
Agency, Department of Energy (advisor)*

*Federal Leadership Forum on Oil and Gas and NEPA
Fact Sheet
June 2000*

- Provide direction and decisions on implementation of recommendations from teams in accordance with the Federal Leadership Forum Memorandum of Understanding

Core Team

Agency representatives appointed by Federal Leaders

- Provide guidance, coordination, and continuing communication among interagency teams and federal leaders
- Oversee development of guidelines for analysis of effects from oil and gas development on air quality and other resources
- Coordinate implementation of Forum decisions
- Provide for dispute resolution with the dispute resolution plan established under the Federal Leadership Forum Memorandum of Understanding

Phase I (Complete)

NEPA Blueprint Team

Agency representatives with program and technical responsibilities

- Identify weaknesses in the NEPA process for oil and gas, primarily related to inconsistencies between and among agencies
- Develop guidelines for improvement of the NEPA process for oil and gas

Air Quality Technical Team

Agency representatives with program and technical responsibilities

- Identify air quality issues
- Establish a unified framework in which to address technical aspects of air quality

Phase II (Ongoing)

Sub-Teams

Agency representatives with program and technical responsibilities

- Develop guidance specific to oil and gas resource management and NEPA on:
 - Preparing reasonably foreseeable development scenarios*
 - Preparing cumulative impact analyses*
 - Performing regional assessments*
 - Determining thresholds*
- Develop training programs

Recommendations

- Agencies will communicate and collaborate more thoroughly very early in the NEPA process.
- Lead agency or agencies will disclose and consider potential mitigation measures in environmental analyses, including those outside the jurisdiction of the deciding agency or agencies.
- Records of decision will include:
 - Summary of all alternatives considered and identification of environmentally preferred alternative.*
 - Concise summary of mitigation measures the deciding agency or agencies are adopting.*
 - Identification of all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts from the selected alternative, and explanation of why some measures might not be adopted.*
 - Summary of monitoring and enforcement programs adopted in the decision.*
- For individual oil and gas environmental analyses, agencies will use the established dispute resolution process to ensure that any disputes which may arise are resolved in a timely manner.
- Agencies will develop interagency training and share detail assignments to provide additional opportunities to improve communication, understanding, and trust among agencies.
- Agencies will encourage interagency stakeholder groups to address significant issues and develop modeling protocols for individual environmental analyses.

Actions

- Interagency Core Team is dynamic and will continue to address ongoing issues such as gas development in the greater Rocky Mountain region.
- Field units will implement recommendations as appropriate in new and ongoing environmental analyses.

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